

Edited Interview with Jean-Jacques Caillabet in Les Frères Jacques (7/2/2008)

Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire (MM) Jean-Jacques Caillabet (JJ)

1. **MM:** So where and when were you born?
2. **JJ:** I was born on the 9th August 1946 in a small well-known seaside resort in Brittany called La Baule, which was a quite up-market resort, which is busy from Easter to late August.
3. **MM:** How many were in the family?
4. **JJ:** There were six in the family, I was the last, the baby, four sisters and one brother.
5. **MM:** Was there any catering in your family?
6. **JJ:** There was no catering in the family as such, but although it sounds a bit of a cliché, my mother was the biggest influence on me in cuisine, She was a very good *cuisinière* rather than a chef, very knowledgeable and very creative, I remember shopping in the market with her from a very young age, it sounds clichéd but it is true, she had a pile of recipes that she tore out of magazines and she loved to entertain at weekends, so there was strong mother influence in what happened in my later stage of life.
7. **MM:** What did your father do?
8. **JJ:** My father had a small factory manufacturing yoghurt in that region.
9. **MM:** So there was some food in your family (laugh).
10. **JJ:** Oh, yes there was food, but that region was severely hit by the war in 1944 because very near La Baule was St. Nazaire, right on the estuary of the Loire, that was a U-boat station, and there is still a massive submarine base there. After the liberation of Normandy, the Germans retreated into pockets and they were that region and so the Americans came and bombed everything and St. Nazaire was erased completely. My parents had been living there and before he manufactured yoghurt he was managing a cheese wholesale and retail shop, but it was bombed completely and they had to leave, restructure their lives and became farmers during the occupation and from there they had a herd of cows and they made the yoghurt from the milk. So that was the link with the food.
11. **MM:** When did you get started with the food business? I take it you went to the local primary school, how about the secondary school?
12. **JJ:** I was meant to be in the *industrie de bouche*, I wanted to be a vet. But circumstance, money, various factors, probably intellect as well meant that I went into catering but at quite a late age really, I was twenty and I went to Paris to start at the very bottom.
13. **MM:** *Plongeur?* (laugh)
14. **JJ:** *Plongeur*, yes, *commis de bas*: what they call in England a 'busboy', and that is how I started in catering.
15. **MM:** Where in Paris did you start as a busboy?
16. **JJ:** In a restaurant on the Champs Elysée called the 'Drugstore', It was a big company and they had five units, three on the Champs Elysée and another one in St.Germain, and one at La

Defence. It was owned and operated by an advertising company called *Publicis*. The reason I got there was because my brother who was older than me was the director of one of the units there. He was running a unit in the middle of the Champs Elysée called the *Pub Renault* because it was a Renault showroom and he was managing that unit, and the décor was all into cars, it is disappeared now. So that was very valuable experience as a young apprentice, and my advantage was I had further education so I possessed English quite well at that time and languages were my strong point, English and Spanish, so I kind of moved on and after that I went to the Eiffel Tower.

17. **MM:** Just before we go the Eiffel Tower, can I bring you back to education. You said you had third level education, did you study languages in University?
18. **JJ:** I did the equivalent of the Leaving Certificate, the *Baccalaureate*, so obviously you have languages as the curriculum and I had Spanish and English and I had a strong tie with English speaking people and I went a couple of times to England, I found I had a facility for languages but I didn't study languages as such.
19. **MM:** So you moved on the *Tour Eiffel*?
20. **JJ:** At the time at the *Tour Eiffel* you had on the first floor was a gastronomic restaurant which was a very old institution with the chef there for years and years, I don't remember his name, but a very classic gastronomic restaurant and they had an absolutely extraordinary cellars that was on the other side of the Seine in a kind of a *cave* or basement, and it was an absolute Aladdin's Cave, so I stayed there in the gastronomic restaurant for a while. There was different types of restaurant in the *Tour Eiffel*, on the second floor, there was a kind of a *Brasserie*, and another restaurant which was a bit more up-market, and now I think they have moved the gastronomic restaurant to the second floor and they had nothing on the third floor because it was too small, so they had obviously different markets under the same roof.
21. **MM:** So you were working there, were you always front of house?
22. **JJ:** I was always front of house, I started as a *commis*, and ended up as a kind of *commis de suite*, a sort of waiter, but in these old brigades you had such structure and hierarchy that you could be a *commis* or *commis de suite* and then you might verge to become an assistant waiter, and it is very interesting now because it hardly exists now. In those days staff were not as expensive as now, it was very interesting from the cover on the table to the *maitre d'hotel*, to the *sommelier*. I got a very good experience there and then I went to the army.
23. **MM:** When you were there, I take it was all silver service at the time?
24. **JJ:** Absolutely, all silver service, a lot of Gueridon work, then even the salad, something as simple as a salad, the vinaigrette was made at the table to the request of the client. All the carving was done at the table, you know, the duck, all the meats, the *Côte de Boeuf*, the *canard à la* (inaudible) and all the flambé as well.
25. **MM:** Would there have been an *hors d'oeuvres* trolley and a sweet trolley as well?
26. **JJ:** Oh, there was a sweet trolley, but there was an *à la carte* as well, because you had full choice because of the flambé dishes in the dessert and you obviously had a guy who would do the carving at the table, they were carving the parma ham and the salmon at the table meaning the team there was at the time and as I was saying the *commis de suite*, there was a huge kitchen underneath the restaurant, and as a *commis de suite* you collected the dishes, and if there was a sauce with it, you were going to the *saucier*, the *entremetier*, the *garde manger*, to the various. I don't think now there are many places where young people can experience that kind of work, it is much more simplified, even in the Michelin star places, there is still a bit of that but not as much.
27. **MM:** So this is around 1967 or so?

28. **JJ:** Yes, I went to the army in 1968 so I had about four year before that.
29. **MM:** 1968 was a very big year in France?
30. **JJ:** '68 was a very big year because we had our mini revolution, and again because I was in catering, you did eighteen months in those days, but there was three months they called 'the class' which really was three months of initiation to be a soldier, to have your vaccination and to have your blood taken for the good of the nation, very good source of blood donors – you were an automatic volunteer (laugh), and then after three months you would be dispatched to your final stay of your army time, but because I was in catering, a lot of the young catering lads were sent in Paris itself preferably as waiter or chefs for the mess of the generals or whatever, but I ended up being a driver for the mess of the army ministry which was right in the centre of Paris. And my function as a driver was to go the market in *Les Halles* in the centre of Paris and I was driving a kind of van, Citroen van, and I was going with the officer that was in charge of the mess, kind of canteen for officers, and I would go with him to the market and collect everything and bring it back to the kitchens. So that was very lucky for me because I had a kind of civilian regime as such, because I was not sleeping in the barracks, I just had to be in at 7am and at 5pm I had a civil servant regime, meaning I could work in the evening.
31. In the evening I was working in a restaurant in *L'Île de la Cité* to kind of get a bit more money than the army were providing. That was an interesting experience because in *Les Halles* at the time the market was still there before moving out to *Rungis* sometime in the '70s. So that was a very good experience, obviously they were trying to exploit guys who were chefs or guys who were waiters and I was lucky to end up as a driver of vegetables not a driver of an officer which means picking up the kids from school (laugh) and doing the shopping, and that I could work a night in the restaurant.
32. **MM:** This restaurant you worked in, what kind was it?
33. **JJ:** It was a kind of themed restaurant; it was called the *Sargent Recruteur*.
34. **MM:** Very good, the recruiting sergeant and you in the army at the time! (laugh)
35. **JJ:** It was a kind of theme restaurant, when you came in you sat at a table and two baskets came to the table, one containing cruditees and the other one containing saucisson of all kinds, brought to the table would be bread and cornichons and that was how you were welcomed. It was a kind of a meat restaurant, nothing gastronomic but good and honest, so that was what I did to make more money, and obviously '68 happened and that was a turbulent time, particularly if you were in the army, all the leave was stopped, because they wanted to see as little soldiers in the street as possible, but as you know, when you are in the army you belong to the army, you don't belong to any political, you are not allowed to voice an opinion, perhaps that has changed? But as it were, I had *couchage exterior* which meant I could sleep outside. But I remember living outside of Paris and driving after work and you had constant control of the road with checkpoints with machine guns and it was quite hot. So that was interesting, so that was finished and I decided to start my solo career, and become a restaurateur in my own right. In retrospect, it was too early, still so I was twenty five when I took my first business which was a *Gérance Libre* which is a free letting of a fully equipped restaurant and it was a small hotel, a *pension famille*, in a ski resort just above *Megève*, in a small village of about 380 inhabitants which would grow to much more than that during the ski season, but basically it was called *Crest Volant* just beside *Notre Dame de Bellecombe* about 10km from *Megève* which is one of the oldest ski resorts in the Alps. That hotel was a twenty five bedroom hotel with a restaurant and a bar, and I took it over with my wife to be, we got married actually in that resort.
36. **MM:** And your wife's name?

37. **JJ:** My wife's name is Susan, she is an English lady, but we are divorced now.
38. **MM:** How did you hook up with an English lady? Of course you had been to England?
39. **JJ:** I had been to England but I didn't meet her there, she came to France as a babysitter for my brother with whom I was living in Paris and she was eighteen years of age. So we took that business for the winter, it went quite well, I had a chef in the kitchen, obviously to answer your earlier question I was always in the front of house but I have a very tight relationship with my kitchen, always got my kitchen to work with me, not the other way around, but just as respect for a trained chef, I always say I am a cook but I understand very well what is going on. I had a few occasions to go in there, not by choice, but I had to, so I am very close to the food side of a restaurant. So anyway we took that business and we did the summer season as well and we did the next winter season as well. After that, during the second winter season we met an English couple from Manchester, and he was in the fish wholesale business and the connection came from the fact that my wife to be, her parents had a fish and poultry retail shop in Moss Side, Manchester, and they came to stay with us the second winter we had the business and enjoyed themselves very much and became friendly. We finished that second season and then we went back to *La Baule*, my birthplace where I opened a restaurant in partnership just between *La Baule* and *Guérande*. *Guérande* is a very well-known because it is a fortified city, a bit like *Carcassonne*. We opened a restaurant which was called *Le Triangle*, and that was with a friend of mine and he was quite older than me and he wanted to open a restaurant and it was between seasons and I didn't know what to do, so we opened that restaurant from scratch, he had a premises there and we named it after the triangle that is used in the west to call people to eat. So we created a restaurant which was quite nice, the idea was we built a big chimney in the room where we were doing a lot of *grillade*, there was a big chimney with a grill, a small kitchen with the work top and refrigeration underneath. Obviously it was a restricted menu but we were doing grilled fish and grilled meat, some small starters, but again it was a seasonal business, a summer business, and like all seasonal businesses whether they are in the mountains or the seaside, if the weather is bad the people moan and groan and leave. Seasonal business are no good.
40. At that point and time, the couple from Manchester approached us to open a restaurant in partnership and that is how we moved to Manchester where we spent eleven years.
41. **MM:** What was the name of the restaurant in Manchester?
42. **JJ:** Well I had two restaurants in Manchester. The first restaurant was called *La Marmite*, named after the soup cauldron, and that was a basement restaurant, quite a nice restaurant in its day, I had a French chef, always a French team. I was doing a lot of fish, I always had a lot of fish on my menu, and we stayed there for five years and the reason for that, I discovered later, at the time my English was good but not technical, my partner had taken a five year lease that was not renewable. *La Marmite* was on Faulkner Street just off Princess Street in the city centre. The building above us was unoccupied and belonged to the Post Office and after five years they kicked us out. Interestingly enough, Patrick Guilbaud was my head waiter for nearly four years down there. He won't say that (laugh). Don't tell him I said that.
43. **MM:** I'm talking to him next week. I'll let him mention it.
44. **JJ:** He actually got married in my restaurant; we know each other quite well. *La Marmite* actually closed and Patrick opened his own restaurant in Alderley-Edge in Cheshire. So after that I took over a restaurant / casino which was just around the corner from us and I called *L'Elysée* and that restaurant was at street level with the casino underneath and it was a strong casino which was owned by a French gentleman who was in the gaming business and he owned another casino in Blackpool and in the South of France. He decided at the time to compliment his casino by running a very up-market restaurant, which was very up-market but he was not a restaurateur and he used to come to *La Marmite* and he was very fanatical about eating fish at the time, Lobster, his name was Mr. Emil Simplici. His favourite dish was *Homard à la Nage* and I got to know him quite

well. At the time his restaurant was the top of the top, but his restaurant did not go well because many of the gambling clients were eating for free etc.

45. Anyway, he was unhappy, and my lease was running out and I arranged to take over the lease on his restaurant and re-named it L'Elysée. It was about 5,000square feet, with a grill nearly in the room, a big kitchen, it was a dream but sort of outside of my means. There was a dance floor with a DJ so it went quite good for the first two years and then England came into a recession and we had a lot of business accounts which just died.
46. **MM:** What year is this now?
47. **JJ:** That would be, let's see, 1975 or so.
48. **MM:** So the recession came around 1977, the casino was still running downstairs but you were not giving free meals to the customers? It wasn't like Vegas? (laugh)
49. **JJ:** Yes, (laugh), no (free meals), and then this is when the Irish times came about. When we were in Manchester we bought a labourer's thatched cottage near Ballycotton (Co, Cork). Just to situate you the time, you had here a major strike, no transport, no petrol – the end of the '70s, and the reason why I recall very well, my wife saw an add in the paper for a cottage for sale at auction and the auction was in a hotel on the mall (the Imperial), so I rang the agent and we flew to see it and visitors had coupons to get petrol and we arrived, met the agent, loved the cottage and I flew back the following week for the auction. There was brochures on every chair but nobody else there on the day of the auction, so the auctioneer arrived and said the wrong day was advertised in the paper, so I bought the cottage anyway. That was my first foot hold in Ireland.
50. **MM:** Had you been to Ireland before?
51. **JJ:** I had been to Ireland once on my motorcycle; I'm a biker, so I had been here once for a weekend. In the meantime my business in L'Elysée was falling and we had met again connected to my wife's family one of the directors of a development company in Cork called Power Securities and he was the director of a really up coming company which was mainly in Cork. We were invited to come and visit their latest development which was in the Queens Old Castle in Cork and what they were doing mostly was developing shopping centers. So we made a deal to take a unit there on the first floor to open a restaurant which was named the *Café de Paris*. My brother helped me financially to open that. That went quite well as well at that beginning, but never reached any great..., I think we were ahead of our time in Cork. At the time it was the Oyster Tavern, there were a few restaurant but not in the same market, what we were doing was a typical French Brasserie, again doing a lot of fish, we had a big mobile blackboard that we bought in a convent that was closing, we had two or three blackboards with the specialties written on them. It was a very nice place, anyway, I still have customers coming here today that started in Cork. So that started not to go to well at all and in the meantime Power Securities took over the Galleria in Stephen's Green in Dublin, just at the corner of Grafton Street, do you know it there?
52. **MM:** I know it, and the *Café de Paris* was there, so that was you?
53. **JJ:** So what happened is they approached me to open another *Café de Paris* in Dublin, now they knew my situation, the reason we were not doing the business in Cork was not my mismanagement or mis-knowledge or that, it was just the market wasn't ready and the shopping center overheads was quite serious in those days. So I said, 'ok, I'll open in Dublin, but I have no money, and not only that I have no money but what I had is going down the tube in Cork' so I said 'I will need a loan and I will open'. So they got me a £20,000 unsecured loan from Bank of Ireland and we opened the *Café de Paris* here.
54. **MM:** Do you remember what year *Café de Paris* opened?

55. **JJ:** *Café de Paris* opened in late 1982, I opened here (*Les Frères Jacques*) in 1986 and I sold *Café de Paris*, sold the lease. So we ran that for about three or four years.
56. **MM:** So how big was *Café de Paris*, how many seats?
57. **JJ:** 120 seats.
58. **MM:** Wow, I recall there was a guy, Gerry Reddigan who worked there?
59. **JJ:** Yeah, Gerry worked with us, my chef was Spanish at the time, he had been the chef in Lovett's in Cork and he had worked in Arbutus Lodge as well and he came to *Café de Paris* in Cork from Lovett's and then he came to Dublin with me.
60. **MM:** Do you remember his name by any chance?
61. **JJ:** Yes, Manuel Las Heras. I know his name quite well because he divorced and his wife is now my partner (laugh).
62. **MM:** You have good reason then to know his name (laugh). So this was a big undertaking with 120 seats?
63. **JJ:** *Café de Paris* in Cork was the same size, it was the Brasserie type table so you could pack them in, because you had to meet the overheads. The overheads here in Dublin was quite high at the time, I think I was paying £40,000 a year plus service charge and that was back in 1983, I think we were a bit ahead of our time in Dublin as well, when you see what has happened since, you know. So a guy bought it and I think he ran it for nine months or so.
64. **MM:** So you ran it for three and a half years or so, what was happening in Dublin at that time, in the early '80s, was Whites on the Green there yet?
65. **JJ:** No, not quite, that came a little later, I knew Michael Clifford quite well, who was the chef there, he's dead now. It was just about to open when we closed.
66. **MM:** What was your main competition at the time?
67. **JJ:** The main competition was the likes of these big restaurants in Dawson Street at the time, *Café Klara* was not open yet nor was the Fitzer's Café, no there wasn't an awful lot at the time.
68. **MM:** I'm just thinking what was there in the early '80s, the Soup Bowl was there, Snaffles, Celtic Mews was there, The Lord Edward, was the Grey Door opened?
69. **JJ:** Yes the Celtic Mews and the Grey Door, and the Lord Edward had been open for a long time, and Dobbin's had been open for a while as well. There was a few, but not in our style, there was not a lot in our style.
70. **MM:** That's right because at that time you had places like Captain America's opening and I think Casper and Gambini's was open in Wicklow Street where the old Wicklow Hotel had been. And you had the Berni Inn where Jammet's had been. Solomon Grundy's was there as well wasn't it?
71. **JJ:** Yes indeed, that's right the Berni Inn was there, but interestingly enough it was all on this side of the city (around Grafton Street), there was nothing on the other side of the river, you know.
72. **MM:** Yes, that's right; they were all on the south side of the city. The Bad Ass Café had opened as well in Temple Bar but you were aiming higher than that, but lower than the *Coq Hardi* or that.



Figure JJ.1: Café de Paris Headed Paper

73. **JJ:** Yes we the kind of little up-market brasserie with the fresh, the same formula as Cork, we had the big blackboard that would be wheeled to your table and I was doing a lot of fish. I was buying my fish in Union Hall in Cork, I was driving every week with my fish from Cork and that again was an interesting time. So we sold again in 1986.
74. **MM:** Again you feel that the market wasn't there; you were ahead of your time. When you think about it, it is that kind of restaurant that is doing very well at the moment when you think of the likes of *l'Guelletton* or *Venu*.
75. **JJ:** Yes, Brasserie Sixty-Six and Fallon & Byrne and that.
76. **MM:** Do you remember your staff there, you had Manuel and Gerry Rettigan, who was your managers?
77. **JJ:** Yes, Gerry was my second chef. I had actually three managers in the room because we were open obviously all God's hours to meet the overheads before we could meet any profit. I had a Spanish guy, Francisco, who worked for a long time after that in the Westbury Hotel. There was

a young German guy, Horst, I can't remember either of their surnames, and I had a French guy called Phillipe Missichi.

78. **MM:** Ah, yeah, he went on to open a restaurant?

79. **JJ:** He opened a restaurant in Harcourt Street called *La Mistral*. He came and worked here (*Les Frères Jacques*) after and went on to have a colourful career.

80. **MM:** Gerry Reddigan opened a restaurant in Harcourt Street as well called Stokers, didn't he?

81. **JJ:** In my head chefs I didn't have a lot of movement in my head chefs in the Galleria. Manuel was my head chef and Mano was more a classical chef. He was an excellent chef trained in Spain from a father who was a chef as well, I never met the father but on all accounts, he was an excellent chef as well. Mano was very talented, but obviously his personality was very introverted, he stayed in his kitchen. So he came here when we opened up in 1986.

82. **MM:** Those years you are talking about from 1983 to 1986 must have been some of the worst years of the Irish economy, because I remember leaving school in 1986 and it was just depressing. Everyone was emigrating and the taxes were so high, it must have been tough, yeah, how did you finish there and come here, was there a break?

83. **JJ:** It was tough, I knew I was selling, I knew I had a buyer so I started looking for premises, and really the idea was away from big place, big rent, big overheads, and to go back to my original training which was a bit more up-market. So I looked for suitable premises where the overheads would not be too big and the location was not that important because I had in mind to create something where people would want to come irrespective of the location where, within certain limits, obviously. So I started prospecting and that is how I came to Dame Street. I think I saw the place being advertised and we came here.

84. **MM:** What was here before you?

85. **JJ:** It was a restaurant, it was a small restaurant, and it had a mezzanine situation like this but structurally completely different.

86. **MM:** Do you know what it was called?

87. **JJ:** It was two partners and one of them was Greek or something, Cypriot or something, and an Irish guy I still see sometimes, but it is too vague. It was restaurant though. So I found that and the rent was £10,000 compared to £40,000 plus expenses in the other place, so obviously the budget was tight because I sold *Café de Paris*.

88. **MM:** Who bought *Café de Paris* from you?

89. **JJ:** Danny Fox, a guy called Danny Fox, he was a haulier, in the haulage business. His chef was his brother, James Fox, who started to work in the big place on Dawson Street later, *La Stampa*.

90. So that is how I bought this place, obviously we were on a shoestring budget, Cork had gone down, I still had debt to repay, I sold *Café de Paris* here, I did not sell, I was bought. I realised it was too difficult to run, anyway with a small budget we had and we found here and we opened in Easter of 1986.

91. **MM:** I'm just thinking of the name of the restaurant, was your brother still financially involved here?

92. **JJ:** No, not at all. It was actually my ex-wife that came up with the name. When at first we were searching for a name for it we had three criteria to follow: first it had to be very French, it could not be mistaken for another nationality; the second one was that it had to be catchy, easy to remember; and thirdly, easy to pronounce, so that is where we chose *Les Frère Jacques*. So obviously the identity was clear, we all learn the song at school even in English speaking countries.



Figure JJ.2: Menu Cover from Les Frères Jacques

93. **MM:** So when you opened up, Manuel came as your head chef, and Phillipe Misisichi came as your manager, how did things go?
94. **JJ:** Well things went very slow, there were two chefs in the kitchen, Mano had an apprentice, he was a French guy, a young commis, I don't remember his name. I remember his face very well, an obviously it went quite slow because as you know Dame Street in 1986 was not particularly up-market, it is still not up-market despite the Temple Bar *Quartier Latin, Rive Gauche*. It was mostly Chinese restaurants, Kingsland and Fan's, and Italian restaurants like Nico's that has been there for years and has not changed at all, it is amazing. And obviously we had no working capital, so it was really shoestring and progressively it started. I'll always remember we were not able to buy cigars for the customers, not loan from the bank or whatever.
95. **MM:** And where were you living at this stage?
96. **JJ:** I was living in rented accommodation in Scholarstown Road – very posh. What happened is that we developed a bit and the landlord at the time approached me to see if I would buy the building so that was in 1986 and the building at the time was £110,000. An obviously with my string of misadventures I was quite slow, but eventually I took the plunge, and then he had the

building next door and he offered it to me but I said that it would be too much for me, but little do you know – unless you have a speculative mind, which I didn't. And then we grew the business and our team in the kitchen grew, I had three Irish head chefs here.

97. **MM:** Do you remember who they are?

98. **JJ:** Yes of course, the last one was Darragh Kavanagh, then John Dunne and Michael Rath.

99. **MM:** Maybe if we take it chronologically, you started with Manuel and a French commis, how long did he stay with you?

100. **JJ:** About four years, and then came John Dunne who had worked with Burton Race in *L'Oriental*. Michael Rath had worked here with John Dunne, but John only stayed a year here, I think he was very stressed after Burton Race. We stayed friends but he left a bit strange.

101. **MM:** Did he go out to Morel's then?

102. **JJ:** I think so. (**note:** John Dunne went from *Les Frères Jacques* to Colin O'Daly in the Park, Blackrock, and then out to Morel's, when Colin went bankrupt) So, next came Eric Tydgad (who is Belgian) who spent about three years here. (**note:** Eric left to open *La Mere Zou* in Stephen's Green in 1994). (**note:** I think Michael Rath must have come after Eric for a few years as head chef) Then after him came a French guy called Nicolas Boutin who spent with me I think another four years, we will have to add up the years, and he left to open the *Maison de Gourmet* in partnership with Olivier, I think they are out of it now, Guilbaud was involved, but I think they have their own bakery now. Nicolas stayed with me for four years and opened that and then he went off to the St. James near Bordeaux as a *sous chef*, they had a Michelin star there. After that he went to some Caribbean hotel and two years ago, actually, I went to meet him for a holiday in Hong Kong, where he was with the Mandarin Group. He is still with the Mandarin Group, but he took a position of executive chef in Boston. Then I had another Irish guy called Darragh Kavanagh.

103. **MM:** Where did he train?

104. **JJ:** Darragh trained in France, fluent French speaking, Spanish mother, Irish father, very talented chef, he started well but not a very good finish – a difficult character, but very talented chef. He took a position in Jacobs Ladder but then went back to Valencia in Spain. For the last four years we have had Richard Reau, whose French from the Paris region, married to an Irish lady who prospected the position for him here, she wanted to move home, obviously when Kavanagh left, Richard took over.

105. **MM:** Otherwise in the kitchen, I have the head chef, second chef, *chef de partie*, commis and *patissier*. At the moment they are all French, I've had Irish lads as well.

106. **MM:** I suppose you have never had problems employing French chefs because of the European Union, in terms of work permits. Since I am writing about a hundred years, there was a time when work permits were an issue, but not since the EU. Tell me about your managers here?

107. **JJ:** Well my managers, when Phillipe left, Sylvain Vallier, my actual manager now has been eighteen years with me now, he worked in Guilbaud's and came here then. Yvan Benezech has been with me for five years, and my sommelier Michael Riedel has been with me for ten years. A very steady team.

108. **MM:** That is a great name for a sommelier, Riedel, like the wine glasses. How has your food changed in the last twenty years?

Les Entrées		Viandes et Volailles	
<i>Minestrone de Fruits de Mer</i> <i>Seafood minestrone with vegetables</i>	£4.50	<i>Medaillons de filets de bœuf aux champignons sauvages</i> <i>et bourgogne rouge</i> <i>Medallions of beef fillet with a burgundy sauce and forest mushrooms</i>	£17.50
<i>Petit Porc au Feu de Suprême de pigeon et saucisses confites</i> <i>de Toulouse</i> <i>Little hot pot of pigeon breast and confits of Toulouse sausage</i>	£5.90	<i>Suprême de Canard mariné aux épices et fruits confits</i> <i>Duck suprême marinated in red wine and spiced with a spicy sauce and a fruit confit</i>	£16.90
<i>Quartier de ris de veau et rognons, sur galette de</i> <i>potatoes de terre, sauce au jus de truffes</i> <i>Quartier of veal rissole and kidneys on a potato cake with truffle sauce</i>	£7.00	<i>Selle d'agneau aux arômes de Provence, jus auignon</i> <i>et petite tartelette de tomate</i> <i>Saddle of lamb with provencal aromas, a variety of tomato and dill sauce</i>	£17.50
<i>Les Escargots de Bourgogne à l'ail sur canapés</i> <i>Snails served by garlic butter served on bread</i>	£6.90	<i>Tournedos de Veau aux Pâtes fraîches et sa</i> <i>sauce pistou</i> <i>Tender meat tournedos on a bed of fresh hand-cut coloured pasta and basil, garlic and olive oil sauce</i>	£18.00
<i>Revalade de Saumon fumé, crème citronnée, caviar de saumon</i> <i>et aneth</i> <i>Stuffed smoked salmon rindade with sour cream dressing, red onion and dill</i>	£6.75		
<i>Brioche chaude de gibier au porc</i> <i>Hot brioche stuffed with game meat and mushrooms and rich pork sauce</i>	£5.75		
Poissons - Crustacés - Coquillages		Desserts	
<i>Suggestions selon les arrivages du jour, sélectionnés et achetés par nos soins</i> <i>Fish and seafood suggestions according to daily market availability</i>		<i>Poire caramélisée aux pignons de pin et glace au miel</i> <i>Caramelised pear, pine kernels and a honey ice-cream</i>	£5.50
		<i>Tarte au Citron légère, sauce chaude aux fruits</i> <i>Citrus meringue tart with a hot fruit sauce</i>	£5.00
		<i>Tiercé de Sorbets exotiques avec leurs coulis en petit panier</i> <i>de nougatine</i> <i> trio of exotic fruit sorbets served in a brandy snap basket with their assorted sauces</i>	£5.50
		<i>Gâteau au Chocolat amer, aux deux sauces</i> <i>Bitter chocolate soufflé cake, served with vanilla and coffee sauce</i>	£6.00
<i>Smoking may not appear in all our portions, please be considerate</i> <i>Pipe smoking is not allowed</i> SERVICE CHARGE 12.00%		<i>Plaque de Fromages</i> <i>All our cheeses are imported directly from France</i> £5.00	

Figure JJ.3: Menu from Les Frères Jacques

- 109.JJ: I don't it has changed that much, because I have set style of cuisine that I have stayed very faithful too, because I think we are very French and I wanted to stay that way so that when people come here they found what they were looking for, we are very French, fairly classical and conservative type of cuisine. I like very distinctive cuisine. I don't like too much the modern style of, you know, building up presentation, I'm not too keen either on the mixing of different ingredients from various countries, but we would be quite modern as well, as much as we can, but really we are classical, really sauces, but what have we changed, the sauces are a bit lighter. But otherwise I don't think we have changed that much, we always did a fair bit of seafood and fish, which is in a matter of fact about 70% of our sales, I think we are known for that as well: shellfish, lobsters, we always have a very good selection of fish so we kept that very much alive. I love to see the guys work with fish, and I love to sell fish, and obviously the product we have here (in Ireland) is so fantastic so why not use it? I think I always looked at my chefs, even with the Irish lads, they were really within that line of cuisine.
- 110.MM: The French classical training as such?
- 111.JJ: Yes, and that was very interesting because they obviously loved the type of cuisine and I like my chefs to express themselves at every level, when we do menus I say well what did you learn where you come from, and anything interesting I like to pick out, even one thing in six months, and so I think we have stayed pretty faithful to what we set to be and to do.
- 112.MM: From the time you opened up, has it always been plate service or did you do sole on the bone with the Gueridon?
- 113.JJ: No not at all, the only thing we do is Sole is served off the bone all the time but it is done in the kitchen. The other thing we do is *Crepes Flambé* but is very restricted, we don't have the space even for a trolley of cheese, because we have a very good selection of cheese which is again

within our identity and it is a loss making venture. We don't have the space to do any *Gueridon* work, if we do a *Côte de Boeuf*, for example, we present it to the table but carve it in the kitchen.

114.MM: Have you had any women working for you in the kitchen?

115.JJ: Yes, I have one at the moment, a French girl, yes, I have had a French pastry girl who worked with us for a while, who was actually a friend of Eric Tydgad, that's how she came here. She opened a *Pâtisserie* in Marseille or some city in the South of France. A very good girl, I've had a few, not many, but I've had a few. And again because they were not available when I was looking rather than anything else.

116.MM: It wasn't a sexist thing?

117.JJ: No, absolutely not, I'm very open as well as with my chef, I also say that talent has no nationality, if you are talented in what you do, what is important is where you learn and how you developed. If you have the talent, you are a talented person and that is it. Obviously the Irish guys that were here responsible for the kitchen had a very strong French training, I'm not saying it is the best, but for what I'm doing it is important. If an Irish guy comes here for the position of head chef, I want to know precisely where he trained before, now it could be here or in England but with people that I would recognise as talented chefs, you know.

118.MM: You are here twenty one years, have you noticed changes in your customers or in their eating habits or things like that?

119.JJ: Oh, yes, for sure, to take something that comes quick to my mind, take *foie gras*. Now, *foie gras* is well accepted and well known and well tasted by Irish people, but go back ten or fifteen years ago and it was different. Obviously people travel much more, because they have the means to begin with, and they have experienced more cuisines, and they are more knowledgeable and that is it. They can afford to eat in good restaurants, and can afford to travel and eat in good restaurants abroad, and I think that it has broadened up a lot, but there are still barriers that you will not pass, if you start dealing with strange offal, you know strange things that are absolutely delicious but would have to give almost free for people to try it, but definitely there is very big change which explains the diversity of ethnic restaurants we have in Dublin. For a small capital city, it's extraordinary the amount there are and since they are open and trade, there must be a demand. Definitely people have become much more knowledgeable, when you look at the food programmes and the wine programmes, you know and everybody wants to become a food critic (laugh) so it has become part now of the culture and the social way to behave. Someone told me the other day to illustrate that, years back if you were having a date with a new girlfriend, you would meet her in a pub with a pint and a bag of crisps. Now you take her out to a restaurant, according to your means, but it is interesting how things have changed.

120.MM: It's true. Would you consider yourself to be an haute cuisine restaurant?

121.JJ: No, (pause), No, (pause), I'm searching for the right description, maybe we are a bit gourmet classic, maybe I'm a bit modest, I don't like to blow my own trumpet, I let people decide for themselves, we are on the edge of gastronomy, but in a simple and very truthful way, a very genuine way, you know. What you have is there, it is fresh and authentic, it is well prepared, there is no fancy footstep in creating the type of cuisine that we do. I believe that simplicity in what a chef is going to produce is very important. That is the way I like it. I dine here and eat here quite often with friends.

122.Once a month we do a lunch with my wine merchant Paddy Kehoe from Wines Direct, and he will bring wines, particularly if he's been abroad and he has brought back wines, he will do a lecture. It is no big headache, but interesting and relaxed, and I devise a menu with my chefs around the wine or vice versa, Paddy may say 'what are you putting on?', so we do that once a month and I watch my chefs, because if I give them carte blanche, I don't want them to be too fancy.



Figure JJ.4: Set Menu for European Security Forum (8/9/94) Les Frères Jacques

- 123.MM: Who do you see as the leaders of *haute cuisine* in Dublin over the last twenty years?
- 124.JJ: Well definitely Guilbaud has a very strong responsibility for bringing a new dimension of dining, whether it is in the cosmetic side of the restaurant, the décor and that, as well as in the cuisine. Definitely he has been a beacon for a lot of restaurants who try and imitate him, and try to do what he was doing. He is in a very special up-market niche and there is a lot of special etiquette attached to dining in Guilbaud's. You don't say 'I was dining in Guilbaud's last Saturday' without being labeled as what, what, what. That's part of what food has become, part of the social status, I suppose.
- 125.I think John Howard, I would regard him as an initiator of good rich gourmet cuisine, Ernies's in his time as well, a very good restaurant. But now it has diversified so much and there is so many people trying to get a share of the eating out market, that the punters expect variety and they get it. We are obviously in the upper end of the market. We have customers who come here and they go everywhere, Guilbaud's, Thornton's and people here comment on that. I think people go to restaurants for specific reasons and specific occasions, so they move around, when they have the

means and money to gravitate among the gastronomic restaurants, they go around and pick their venue according to who and what occasion and according to their mood.

Discussion on newspaper clippings, menus, photos that he gave me to look at and his policy of not serving well known food critics, because he says he has been here twenty years and his regular customers are his best critics.

126.MM: Thanks very much Jean-Jacques for your time.

127.JJ: Not at all, it is good fun, you know.

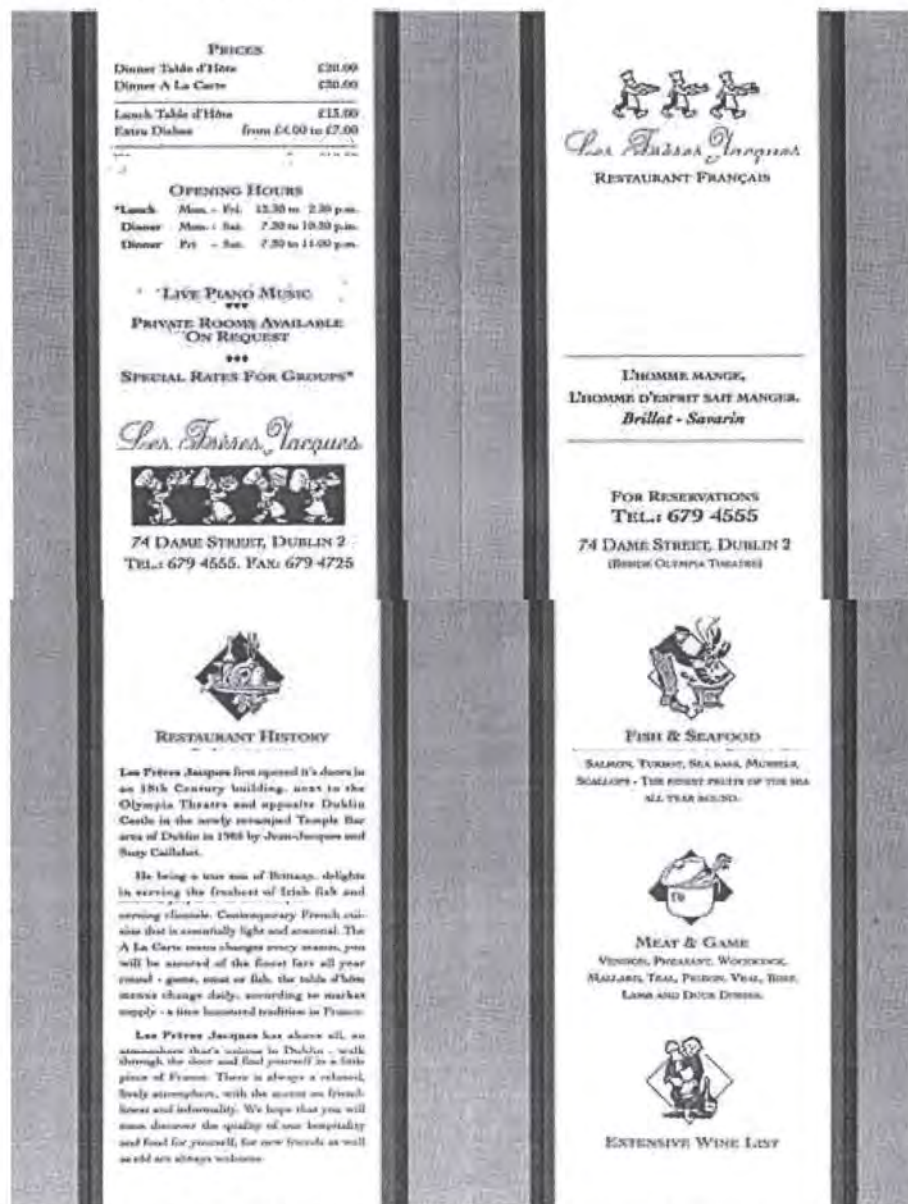


Figure JJ.5: Brochure for Les Frères Jacques

End of Interview